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U.S. BASES IN THE PHILIPPINES:  
BACKGROUND AND FUTURE OPTIONS

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22 February 1990

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE <b>22 FEB 1990</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED -	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>U.S. Bases in the Philippines: Background and Future Options</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>National War College, 300 5th Avenue, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319-6000</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT <b>see report</b>					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>11</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

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U.S. BASES IN THE PHILIPPINES: BACKGROUND AND FUTURE OPTIONS

ISSUE: An integral part of U.S. worldwide security policy is the ability to pursue a forward-based military strategy. The presence of extensive U.S. naval and air installations on the Philippine Islands makes possible the deployment of military power to execute this strategy in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. The agreement allowing U.S. access to the Philippine bases is scheduled to expire in 1991. While the ultimate position of the Aquino government on the base renewal question is not wholly clear, a vigorous campaign against the bases is being waged by Philippine nationalists.

This paper reviews the background to the current situation, recommends a two-track approach to the bases negotiations, and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the approach.

BACKGROUND: The Philippine Islands were under United States jurisdiction almost fifty years--from the end of the Spanish-American War until October 1946 when the Philippines became independent. During that period, Filipinos developed both strong ties and strong antipathies toward the United States.

In 1947, the United States concluded an agreement with the newly-independent Republic of the Philippines giving American forces rent-free access for a period of 99 years and the essentially unrestricted right to operate certain military installations on Philippine soil. The two largest of these installations, and the focus of the current controversy, are Clark Air Base, and the Subic Bay Naval Base and Cubi Point naval air facility.

As a result of negotiations with the Philippine government, the terms of the 1947 agreement have been modified several times. Each modification of the agreement has given the Filipinos greater control over the bases.

The most significant changes in the terms of the bases agreement were made in 1959 and 1979. The modifications made in 1959 by the U.S. Ambassador reduced the duration of the agreement from 99 years to 25 years, and required prior consultation with the Philippine Government in case the United States intended to use the bases for military combat operations outside of U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty and the SEATO agreement. While initially negotiated in 1959, the 25 year limitation of term of the bases agreement did not become effective until September 1966. Thus, according to the American interpretation of the modified agreement, it will expire in September 1991.

In 1979, the Carter Administration agreed to modify the agreement to recognize that the bases were sovereign Philippine military installations under the control of a Philippine military commander. The United States was now given the right to use certain "facilities" on the bases and to exercise command and control over those facilities and U.S. employees. The effect of this agreement was to change the status of American commanders from controlling all of the area of the bases, to users of portions of what were now Philippine bases.

The 1979 changes also required a complete review of the bases agreement every five years until its 1991 termination. In addition, for the first time, a direct link was made between the bases and

compensation by the United States. In a separate letter to President Ferdinand Marcos, President Carter promised his "best efforts" to obtain from Congress a total of \$500 million in security assistance over the next five years.

As a result of the review conducted in 1983, the Philippine base commanders were given access to all areas of the U.S. facilities except for classified or cryptologic equipment storage areas. In a separate letter, the Reagan Administration promised its best efforts to obtain \$900 million in security assistance for the Philippines during the next five fiscal years.

The Aquino Government. Widespread corruption and vote fraud led to the growth of the People Power Movement in the Philippines. In February 1986, a popularly-supported military revolt in Manila led to the replacement--with active U.S. participation--of Ferdinand Marcos as President by Mrs. Corazon Aquino, wife of an assassinated opposition leader. At Mrs. Aquino's behest, a new Philippine constitution was drafted by a Constitutional Commission and approved by Philippine voters in a plebiscite. Two provisions of the new constitution directly affect the bases:

Article II Section 8, states that the Philippines, "consistent with the national interest, adopts and pursues a policy of freedom from nuclear weapons on its territory." Article XVIII Section 25, states that after the expiration of the bases agreement in 1991, foreign bases will not be allowed in the Philippines unless three conditions are met: 1) a treaty--the provision specifies treaty, not executive agreement--is negotiated, 2) the treaty is concurred in by the Philippine Senate, and, 3) if concurred in by the Senate, the treaty is approved by a national referendum.

The review of the bases agreement in 1988 highlighted the aggressive nationalist positions of Philippine Foreign Minister Raul Manglapus, and, at the same time, the tentative leadership

style of President Aquino. Notwithstanding passage of a bill by the Philippine Senate forbidding the entry into Philippine territory of any nuclear weapons carrier, the acrimonious negotiations ended up focusing almost wholly on "compensation." The initial request of Manglapus was for \$1.2 billion a year. In the end, the U.S. State Department promised its "best efforts" to obtain \$481 million a year--a sum which generated strong negative reactions in the U.S. Congress given the inability of the Philippines to put to use very large amounts of aid already authorized both by the United States and multilateral donors.

#### ROLE OF PHILIPPINE BASES IN THE U.S. STRATEGIC MILITARY STRUCTURE IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC

The United States maintains major bases in the Pacific at six major locations: South Korea, Japan, Okinawa, the Hawaiian Islands, Guam, and in the Philippines. The U.S. bases in the Philippines are ideally situated to support military operations in Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean. The facilities at Subic Bay are large enough and sophisticated enough to provide operational support and major repairs on U.S. Seventh Fleet ships and aircraft. The runways and parking areas on Clark Air Base are capable of supporting the deployment of a large military airlift force as well as tactical fighter squadrons. The location of Clark Air Base makes it possible for U.S. C-5 transport aircraft to fly non-stop to Diego Garcia Island, the primary staging point for CENTCOM operations in the Persian Gulf.

#### CHANGES IN THE REGIONAL STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Several changes which have taken place in the regional strategic

environment in the recent past have affected the need for and utility of the U.S. bases in the Philippines.

While major naval and air forces remain, the level of Soviet activity at the former U.S. base at Cam Rahn Bay in Vietnam has decreased markedly in the last 12 months. To the North, Vietnam has completed the withdrawal of its forces from Cambodia. To the West, Soviet troops have left Afghanistan. Much further to the West, the suspension of the Iran-Iraq war has created the conditions for a decreased American presence in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

At the same time this lessening of international tensions is taking place, anomalously, certain members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have come to recognize the benefits of a continuing American "presence" in the area. The ASEAN position is based upon a fear of Chinese military hegemony, fear of Japanese economic hegemony, fear of Vietnamese military adventurism, and a desire for the United States to remain a regional power to contribute to stability in their relations with each other.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHILIPPINES BASES NEGOTIATIONS STRATEGY

The United States should pursue a two-track strategy regarding the Philippine bases: it should negotiate in good faith to continue to maintain an independent U.S. presence in the Philippines at a reasonable cost--after all, the bases are ideally located in that area. However, it should be expected that such a presence will most likely be unacceptable to the Filipinos. Simultaneously, the United States should take steps to arrange that the functions

of the bases be carried out in a distributed fashion elsewhere in the Pacific. The most important thing to insure is the availability of other refueling and reprovisioning sites for current operations.

This two part strategy should be undertaken for two reasons: first, as a realistic way to deal with the possibility of the failure of the talks and, second, if the Filipino Government were willing to agree to some acceptable compromise, it would to provide a better negotiating position for the U.S. side.

#### DISCUSSION

1) The Philippines. Given the domestic political situation in the Philippines, and President Aquino's reticent leadership style, it is highly unlikely that the current level of American control of the Philippine bases will be allowed to continue. The most likely range of outcomes would be for a further--probably unacceptable to the United States--diminution of U.S. control of the bases, to outright expulsion from the bases.

It should be noted here that Mrs. Aquino was part of the opposition to the Marcos government and exhibited a strong antipathy to the existence of the bases. In addition, if she is to be taken at her word, she does not intend to run for President again in 1992. Even if she actively favored a continuation of the bases agreements, whatever political power she may now possess will certainly be less as 1992 approaches and her lame duck status becomes more evident. Since Article XVIII of the new Constitution was intentionally designed by anti-bases Filipinos to make a satisfactory agreement very difficult to negotiate, to overcome this



obstacle would require vigorous Presidential leadership--a characteristic which Mrs. Aquino has not yet displayed even in areas of great importance to her.

In this respect, the U.S. fighter aircraft support for her government against a military coup attempt last December now appears likely to make even more difficult any moves on her part to be flexible on the bases since she will be concerned about appearing too "dependent" on U.S. support. Her refusal to meet Secretary of Defense Cheney in February 1990 lends credence to this view.

Finally, the demands for very large amounts of annual "compensation" by Foreign Minister Manglapus in the recent past have created a great deal of resistance in the U.S. Congress to the appropriation of such large sums. This resistance will act as a strong limit to the latitude of the American bases negotiators, regardless of the Filipino position on sovereignty.

As both a strategic and tactical matter, if it becomes obvious that the outcome of the base negotiations is likely to be unsatisfactory, the best U.S. strategy would be to recognize this fact without particular rancor and prepare to leave. This response, combined with the steps discussed in the next section, would allow the United States to deal with the new situation with the least loss of face--and, perhaps, allow some access to the bases later.

2) Carrying out the Functions of the Bases Elsewhere. The arrangements to carry out the functions of the bases elsewhere should consist of two elements: one element would require a re-deployment of U.S. assets now at Clark and Subic to other existing U.S. bases in the Pacific, the second element would involve negotiat-

ing for greater automatic access by U.S. ships and planes to port and air facilities in ASEAN countries and Australia without the establishment of permanent bases. This is admittedly a second best solution, but one which would recognize the very strong resistance to the creation of any foreign bases in the region.

Redeployment of Forces. The main destinations for redeployed U.S. forces from the Philippines would be Okinawa and Guam. With the recent departure of the B-52 Wing from Guam, the amount of space available there for fighter and airlift assets should be adequate without further construction. Japan would now play the role of the major U.S. naval repair facility in the Western Pacific.

Some analysts have suggested creating new U.S. bases at Palau, Saipan, and Tinian. These options should be actively pursued. However, the rejection, in August 1988, by the Palau Court of Appeals of the treaty with the United States allowing U.S. nuclear-powered warships into the islands provides a very clear indication of how territories which formerly were completely controlled by the United States may now no longer be willing allies.

ASEAN. At the same time that we redeploy U.S. forces to other U.S.-controlled locations, we should focus on obtaining guaranteed access in friendly nearby nations. The justification to ASEAN countries for accepting a U.S. presence should be phrased as follows:

"Since you are concerned about Japanese economic hegemony, Chinese military hegemony, and the possible hostile behavior of your close neighbors, this is an inexpensive way to insure that the American "presence" you desire in the region will continue to be feasible."

In 1989, officials of Singapore--which already provides servicing and facilities for U.S. ships and aircraft--offered to provide

further, unspecified, support for U.S. military units. This offer should be actively pursued. The government of Malaysia, which has stated that it supported a continuation of the U.S. presence in the Philippines, might be willing to allow access to the Butterworth airfield facilities in Penang formerly used by Australia. Finally, Thai relations with the United States, while under some stress on trade matters, should be firm enough to negotiate extended --if not automatic--access to Thai ports and airfields.

Australia. One of the most critical requirements for the success of this strategy is for the United States to continue to have access to air and naval facilities in Australia. If U.S. facilities are removed from the Philippines, effective operational access to the Indian Ocean will depend upon obtaining a way-station between Guam and Okinawa and Diego Garcia. While, as noted above, Singapore could perform this role, Australia would be a more reliable choice. In addition to appeals to ANZUS solidarity, references to Indonesia's erratic, sometimes hostile, relations with Australia would be a strong discussion point.

#### STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE PROPOSED STRATEGY

The main strength of the first part of the strategy is that it allows the United States negotiators to pursue in good faith the best option: continuation of U.S. access to the Philippine bases. I don't see any weaknesses in the first part since it is highly unlikely that the United States would force the Philippine government to accept an American presence against its wishes.

The strengths and weaknesses of the second part of the strategy--redeployment and obtaining widespread access short of

establishing formal base commitments--are intertwined.

The main strengths of redeployment are that it would be a "realistic" recognition of Philippine nationalism, rising anti-nuclear sentiment in the West Pacific, and regional wishes for a continuing American presence--even if that presence is not based in the Philippines. In addition, redeployment might inadvertently allow the United States to avoid future manifestations of what appears to be the chronic instability of Philippine domestic politics and involvement in future military coups. Finally, it could be argued that the United States was wisely taking advantage of the changes in the strategic environment in the region by reducing its presence.

One of the main weaknesses of redeployment is that it obviously appears as a retreat. Perhaps we could adopt Soviet President Gorbachev's strategy of making serious setbacks appear to be master strokes of wise statesmanship. A second weakness is that redeployment would be more costly: in additional steaming and flying time, in additional fuel, in moving expenses, and in building or expanding facilities. A third weakness of the option is that the United States would be put in the position of relying upon the whims of the states which have granted it access. Instead of being at risk in one country--the Philippines--U.S. access could be at risk in several countries. Finally, the short-term nature of the access agreements that might result from redeployment is an obvious weakness. However, dealing with a short time span may be unavoidable regardless where U.S. facilities are located.